THE MINORITY GROUP CHAPLAINS IN THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

BY

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FORT HAMILTON, NEW YORK

3 DECEMBER 1973

PREFACE

I came to the Chaplain School expecting to write a report. I came hoping to write one of my own choice. This was not possible, and I was given the subject "Minority Group Chaplains in the Military Community." I sought to fulfill the original objective -- identify criteria for utilizing chaplains from minority groups in the military community--by sending questionnaires in the field, but this was denied. Therefore, I have established the following objectives: to determine how the minority chaplains shall be selected and recruited; to ascertain what special abilities, techniques and possibilities they bring to the military community; to determine what type of community the minority chaplains were coming into; to discover how the minority group chaplains can best make their contribution to the military community.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1908 Israel Zangwill, a Zionist Jew, wrote a play entitled The Melting Pot. In the play Zangwill put the following words in the mouth of David Quixano:

> America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!. . . - into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.[1]

The idea of the United States as the racial melting pot began as early as 1782. There were those who felt that those who came to these shores were leaving behind their ancient prejudices, religious customs and mannerisms and would embrace new ones. It was felt that "here (in America) individuals of all nations are melted into a race of men."[2]

We know today that those first settlers brought a strong sense of racial and religious superiority over the Indians. They maintained their prejudices and the United States never reached the "Melting Pot" stage. What we could not achieve as a nation, we attempted as an Armed Forces. In July 1948 President Truman signed Executive Order #9981 which said in part:

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[1]Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1973), p. 289.

[2]Ibid., p. 288.

> It is the declared policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.[3]

After the initial resistance, the Army attempted to operate on the "Melting Pot" philosophy. It was felt that once a man put on the green uniform, he lost his racial and ethnic identities and became an "Olive Drab" soldier. A typical example is reported by Brink and Harris from Vietnam where a Black and White marine fought each other. When brought before their commander they were told, "You aren't white, buddy, and you're not black, either. Both of you are . . . green, and don't you forget it."[4]

Fortunately, in recent years the leadership have discovered several things about the Army: that not everyone is, nor have they ever been, "Olive Drab." That the composition of the Army strongly resembles the racial, ethnic and religious make-up of our nation. That the people lumped together as GI's from all the fifty states and possessions bring with them their social, political, religious and anti-religious biases. That their beliefs aren't changed by putting on the "Army green."

Since President Truman outlawed racial, ethnic, religious and sex discrimination in 1948, the Army has developed some active programs to increase minorities in the Army. In today's Army racism is not blatant and overt, but it is more subtle. In today's Army race, religion and sex are still determinants in job assignment, promotion and acceptability.

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[3]William Brink and Louis Harris, Black and White (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), p. 163.

[4]Ibid., p. 162.

Most recently the Army made another very important discovery. It discovered that the Army's religious community cannot be grouped under the broad general headings of Protestants, Catholics and Jews. The military community is a microcosm of the United States with its minority religious and subcultures.

Therefore, in an effort to correct the above deficiency and to further eliminate racial, religious and sex discrimination, the Department of the Army has proposed the Affirmative Actions Plan of 1972. As part of this program the Department of the Army Chaplain has proposed to:

> Increase minority group representation in the Army Chaplaincy by FY 76 . . . to achieve minority group representation commensurate with minority group percentages in the national population.[5]
>
> DEFINITION: Minority group members (as defined by DA) are defined as Negro, Spanish American, American Indian, Oriental American and other minority members.[6]

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[5]U.S., Department of the Army, Race Relations and Equal Opportunity Affirmative Actions Plan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 14 July 1972), p. 4.

[6]Ibid., p. 2.

CHAPTER II

SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

Selection

The criteria for the Army Chaplaincy are contained in AR 601-26. According to DACH-PPC, there will be no special selection or commissioning criteria for minority chaplains. Further, a representative from this office spoke at the U.S. Army Chaplain School and left the impression that there is nothing in the special minority selection programs that will in any way dilute or relax the present Army standards. That no individual, regardless of race or religion, shall be commissioned if he fails to meet the standards.[7]

Recruitment

Realizing the shortage of qualified minority ministers and seminarians, their negative attitude toward the Army and the reluctance of denominations to share them, the Chief of Chaplains has established a multifaceted recruitment program.[8] The aim of the program is to recruit the exceptionally able, well qualified, and highly motivated minority ministers.

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[7]Charles Kriete, CH(COL), lecture given before C-22 Class at USACHCS, 5 November 1973.

[8]Charles S. Rook, "Relevant Factors in Black Culture Foundational to the Recruitment of Blacks for the Chaplaincy," Military Chaplains' Review, April 1973.

The present recruitment plan focuses attention on seminarians and active pastors and to a lesser degree on college students. The program includes minority chaplains assigned to DA and Army level, who are creating and perfecting the program as they go along.

Recently I had an interview with one of the chaplains charged with the responsibility of recruiting minority chaplains. He stated that he was meeting resistance in most minority communities. He felt that part of the resistance came due to the fact that highly qualified minority ministers are afforded a higher leadership role and social status in their communities than are available at the starting position in the chaplaincy. Since the reawakening of racial, ethnic and religious pride among most minorities, they lean more toward separatism, and the Army's integrative ministry doesn't jive with their views. Some potential recruits feel the Army is still a repressive society that will not provide freedom, advancement and equal opportunity for minorities as it does for the majority.

He related several possible recruiting techniques that he might suggest to the Chief of Chaplains. They were:

1. Promote qualified minority chaplains ahead of their peers for greater visibility.
2. Increase key and DA schools assignments for minority chaplains.
3. Bring highly qualified (talent and experience) minority ministers on active duty at higher rank or pay.

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[9]William T. Smith, CH(MAJ), private interview, 5 November 1973.

CHAPTER III

THE MILITARY COMMUNITY - WHAT THE MINORITY CHAPLAINS BRING

First, let me remove the fear that now exists among some White chaplains, that if a large number of minority chaplains come into the Army there will be a relaxing of Army standards and a decrease in the quality of the Corps. There is nothing in the special recruitment program that will in any way dilute or relax the present Army standards. According to the word I have, no individual, regardless of race or denomination, shall be commissioned if he fails to meet the existing requirements. In fact the reverse is true. The program is seeking to recruit only the best from among the minorities.

The minority group chaplains bring to the military community the very possibility that their presence will enable the Army to improve its image in minority communities. The racial incidents in the States and in Europe have seriously damaged the Army's public image. The presence of minority group chaplains, if used effectively, offer the military community an opportunity to avoid most racial pitfalls in the future. Since the minority group chaplains are aware of and sensitive to the moans of despair and cries of anguish of their people, they can make proper and timely interpretation of these frustrations to the community.

The minority group chaplains can be instrumental in helping the community detect, isolate and remove those conditions which, whether by intentional or unintentional design, exclude minorities from receiving their full measure of promotions, justice and assignment satisfaction. They can point out the inequities in the Army system and offer viable solutions to the problems.

There is a religious and cultural reawakening among minorities. The very presence of a large number of minority chaplains in the community will bring further hope and aspiration. The minorities normally identify with the religious leader in such a way that the religious leader becomes a positive image for good. Permitting the minority chaplains to minister to the total community will allow them to share the minorities' rich cultural and religious heritages with community.

Further, the presence of a large number of minority chaplains will give the majority chaplains an opportunity to work through their racial and religious hang-ups through interaction. Such interaction may allow the Army Chaplaincy to finally lead in eliminating racial, social, religious and ethnic biases from the military community.

CHAPTER IV

THE MILITARY COMMUNITY - WHAT THE MINORITY CHAPLAINS FACE

Microcosm of America

The military community is a microcosm of the American community. It is composed of Indians, Caucasians, Blacks, Orientals, aliens, Hispanos, men, women, Southerners, Northerners, Easterners, Westerners, officers, NCO's, EM's and dependents of the same descriptions. These individuals come into the military community from a society where the eleven o'clock hour on Sunday morning is the most segregated time of the week. It is my feeling that Christian ideology is at the very foundation of individual and institutional racism in America.[10] This is evident by the fact that "the church" has always found a way to legitimize racism. In case after case the church hasn't taken its opportunities to be prophetic in the call for human justice. Even today, the church cannot form a united front to combat ethnic prejudice and racial injustice. The military community and the Army Chaplaincy come from this milieu. The Army Chaplaincy is under fire from some denominations, because the Chaplaincy is part of the

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[10] L. L. Knowles and K. Prewitt, Institutional Racism in America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 7.

church's historical position of "conservatism."[11] It hides behind the so-called "gospel" and the old saying, "It's the commander's program" rather than to stand against injustice in the military and to preach the brotherhood of men.

Stacked Against Minorities

Therefore, by evidence and by experience the military community is stacked against the minority group chaplains. They are coming into a community that is established and maintained on White supremacy and White middle-class socio-economic values, a community where success is measured by how well one can internalize White values. The underlying philosophy behind White thinking is "the key to success is talent plus hard work."[12] This is expressed in the famous slogan, "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." There is resentment against the Army attempt to provide equal opportunities for minorities. It is viewed as preferential treatment.

It is the official position of the Department of Army to eliminate racial and sex discrimination from the military community and yet there remain many practices that are either overlooked or legitimized. A few examples are: quarters allowance for females (just ruled illegal); majority of minorities are assigned to combat armed; large number of confinements and bad discharges given to minorities; stiffer

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[11] Report of Task Force in UCC, "Ministries to Military Personnel" (Philadelphia: UCC Press, June 1973).

[12] Floyd E. Lacey, Jr., "Color Me Chaplain" (research paper, USACHCS, 1973), p. 12.

punishment under UCMJ; high visibility assignments of minority chaplains.

Racial Bags

The military community puts minority chaplains in racial bags. The Black chaplains are assigned in positions of high visibility. They are called upon to speak and deal with racial matters that are completely outside of their areas of responsibility. In most cases they are listened to only in racial crisis situations. The Oriental chaplains are viewed and dealt with in the same suspicion as the Orientals were viewed and dealt with following the wars in the East. The Hispano chaplains are viewed as ministering only to their minority group. When they speak with a heavy Spanish accent or have difficulties with the English language, they are not readily heard by their peers or superiors. Another bag is the belief that the minority chaplains can and should solve minority problems.

In spite of all that is wrong with the military community, it is still far ahead of the civilian community in human relations. Two authors wrote:

> While Negro civilians struggle to overcome the antipathy and the prejudice of the white man in the street at home, the Negro GI has found a haven in the U.S. Armed Forces. To be sure racial discrimination . . . still exists . . . But it is safe to say that no where else in American society has the color line been so effectively blurred.[13]

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[13]Brink and Harris, Black and White, p. 162.

CHAPTER V

THE MILITARY COMMUNITY - THE ROLE OF MINORITY GROUP CHAPLAINS

In the previous section we noted how the military community seeks to place minority chaplains in racial bags. The first role of the minority chaplains is to resist these stereotypes. It is my contention that the best way to do this is to take on role of "PROPHET." I define a prophet as one who draws meaning from the past and present to predict the future. As prophets to the military community the minority chaplains must proclaim the "Theology of Liberation." Fulfilling the role of prophets will make them more sensitive to the cries of the minorities. As prophets they will know the frustration of being a minority in a White Society, to live from crisis to crisis without fully understanding the forces that are preying upon life. Such a prophet will proclaim the "Theology of Liberation," because it is a theology that identifies with and arises out of the community of the oppressed. Here I agree with James Cone, the author of A Black Theology of Liberation, who says, "There can be no Christian Theology which is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused."[14]

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[14] James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1970), p. 1.

It will not be easy to proclaim a message of liberation in a community that is satisfied with its accomplishments, in a community that is proud that it is ahead of the civilian community in human relations. But we must have a message for those who maintain a "don't rock the boat" attitude, to those who discriminate regardless of policy and regulation, to those who are struggling not to accept others as equals. To be prophets in such a community means virtually condemning the whole community, because those who are wrong are so well camouflaged until their actions are legitimized.

The minority chaplains are to fulfill the prophetic role of Jesus Christ. Jesus at the well of Samaria did not allow racial or sex bias to dissuade him from his role as proclaimer of liberation to the outcast. He challenged the social, political and religious bigotry in his community.

The minority chaplains must take Paul Tillich's "existential risk," a risk in which the meaning and fulfillment of life is at stake. So far the military has been very rough on social risk-takers. One Black chaplain felt that most Black chaplains had already taken that risk and their efficiency reports were at least twenty points below their peers.[15]

The role of prophet will require the minority chaplains to act as facilitators to the White chaplains, to put them in touch with their religious, racial and cultural hang-ups. It also means that the minority chaplains must work within

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[15]Herbert M. Turner, "The Changing Role of the Black Chaplain" (research paper, USACHCS, 1973), p. 13.

the system at every level of command to make a positive impact on the system. If the Army allows the minority group chaplains to operate as effective prophets, the Army can reach its full potential and become the professional fighting force the American people are demanding.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Because of individual and institutional racism and religious bigotry, our great nation never reached the goal of becoming the "Melting Pot" of the world. There is a strong possibility that some of the same factors will prevent the Chief of Chaplains from increasing minority group representation in the Army Chaplaincy commensurate with their percentages in the national population by 1976. The resistance is too great in the minorities' communities and the Army is still viewed as a repressive society.

Minority chaplains are being recruited to come into a community that cannot tolerate social risk-takers. They are being asked to take the "existential risk" in order to make the community more responsive to longings and aspirations of the minorities. If the minority chaplains are allowed to minister freely to the military community, there is the strong possibility it will become a professional fighting force.

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